



The Loma Alta

A project newsletter for the reconstruction of US 277 in Val Verde County - August 2001

Prepared by the TxDOT Laredo District Public Information Office
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US 277 Loma Alta Project Opens



The US 277 Loma Alta Project opened to the traveling public on August 23.

"It took less than a year (11 months) to substantially complete the multi million dollar project, which is relatively fast considering the environmental, construction and conservation easement issues faced by TxDOT and the contractor, Allen Keller Company, Inc., of Fredericksburg, Texas," said TxDOT Laredo District Engineer Luis A. Ramirez, P.E. who oversees TxDOT construction projects in the eight county district. Ramirez added, "My compliments to the Keller Company for their excellent work."

Loma Alta was perhaps the most labor intensive, obstacle ridden project of the last ten years in Val Verde County due to the terrain along US 277, which is hilly and somewhat mountainous. Dynamite was used at the site to

blast through limestone to create cuts in the landscape needed for construction. Dynamite had not been used in that area for over 10 years but was highly necessary for the reconstruction of the \$8.2 million project.

"Having the safety of the traveling public in mind, we believe that the arduous reconstruction and widening along the US 277 Loma Alta Project has been well worth the wait," Ramirez added. TxDOT's mission is to provide the safe, effective and efficient movement of people and goods.

The traveling public can now expect a level, smooth 40 ft.-wide driving surface to include two 12 feet lanes and two 8 feet shoulders with gentle winding curves and dramatically improved driving visibility. The traveling public can now see clearly ahead or down to the river canyon along the route where as before, travelers had little to no visibility.



The road has 59 drainage structures to drain the water under the road. It includes concrete box culverts, various size corrugated metal pipes, and raised berms to help prevent erosion of the soil. Reece Albert, Inc., a subcontractor, continues to do the surface finish work on the project. The final asphalt pavement surface will follow at the appropriate time. Drainage structure and guardrail work continues.



Photographs taken by TxDOT project inspector Daniel Cantu show the sequencing pattern of the dynamite blasting performed on the project.

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Del Rio Area Engineer Robert (Bob) C. Parker, P.E., said "The original 18 feet wide section of US 277 was built in 1923. The brush would come extremely close to the roadway. In fact, the brush would come overhead on some sections and appear as if though you were driving through a tunnel. Traveling thru this terrain used to be a roller coaster ride, going up and down, but not any more."



Before construction began, the traveling public indicated that an alternate 40-minute detour route (a 41-mile detour) from U.S. 377 in Del Rio to State Highway 55 in Rocksprings and back to U.S. 277 was preferred rather than to be caught in construction. The alternate route chosen would have minimized road closure time by eight months had numerous delays in project not been encountered.



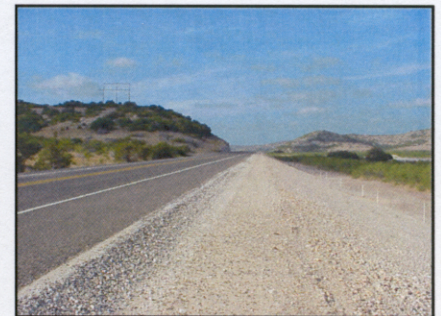
Parker added, "TxDOT employees at the Del Rio Area and Maintenance Offices work diligently and extremely hard with the contractor and subcontractors to insure the proper completion of the construction work and in maintaining safe roadways associated with the project. On many occasions, our staff took the time to explain to the public why the delays occurred. Our staff did an excellent job on the project and in working with the public. I am proud of them."

The Texas Transportation Commission awarded the \$8.2 million contract in March of 2000 for work which included grading, base, structures, surfacing, and the addition of shoulders from the Edwards County line south approximately eight miles. The project is located 48 miles northeast of Del Rio in Val Verde County.

However, no clearing of the terrain was allowed from March 1 to August 31, 2000 due to the nesting season of the Black-Capped Vireo bird, as per the biological opinion and recommendation of the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The contractor was allowed to acquire construction materials during this time period and construction began September 18 after TxDOT performed an additional survey on the Black-Capped Vireo in early September.



The blasting and clearing of the rocky and hilly terrain was done between September 2000 and February 2001 followed by the loading and hauling of rock material, placement of drainage structures and construction of the road subgrade before final surfacing of the road, which is currently taking place. The project also experienced the discovery of burned rock middens, old campsites used by native Indians for cooking and tool making, after which discovery was relayed to Austin who then performed the appropriate archeological recovery work.



The substantially complete project will allow traffic to travel through the entire length of the project while construction continues. Traffic patterns may call for alternating lane closures and a reduction in the legal speed limit from 70 to 55 miles per hour on US 277 until the project is totally complete. The traveling public is asked to drive with extreme caution and observe all traffic safety signs and markings in and around the work area.

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